

UNDER SECRETARY NICHOLAS BURNS
PRESS CONFERENCE
OSCE MINISTERIAL MEETING
MADRID, NOVEMBER 29, 2007

Mike Stevens: Under Secretary of State and head of our delegation, Ambassador Nicholas Burns.

Under Secretary Burns: Good afternoon, I'm happy to take any questions you have. I would just say it's been a very important day here at the ministerial meeting, we are very grateful to the Spanish government and Minister Moratinos for hosting us.

In our intervention today, which is available now, and in the many conversations that we've had with the different leaders here, we've been saying the following today.

Number one, the OSCE is a supremely important institution for Europe now, as it has been in the past. It's been very important for the last sixteen, seventeen years, but it's still important, because it has a mission in Kosovo. And no matter what happens in Kosovo over the next several months, and we're entering a period of transition there, the OSCE must stay. We hope there is a result of the ministerial meeting today we will choose to add a mission of the OSCE into border security for Afghanistan working on the Tajik-Afghan border. We hope very much, as a result of the meetings today, and this is a position that we defended very strongly, that I defended very strongly, that the mandate of ODIHR will not be changed. And I said this morning in my intervention: the United States will protect ODIHR. We will oppose the Russian proposal, which would weaken, and perhaps even cripple, ODIHR. We will not support any compromise proposal that would be negative or problematic or damaging to ODIHR. The deal in OSCE is this: we all are committed to democracy. None of us have the right to rewrite the rules of ODIHR. None of us have the right to tell ODIHR how many monitors it's going to put into our countries for elections. The United States did not do that in 2004, and in 2000. ODIHR said "we want to send the following people" we accepted it, we accepted it, we gave the visas well in advance. And so protecting that objective standard for ODIHR is vitally important for this organization, because the OSCE has to stand for democratic rights, for election rights, for free and fair elections, and so we pointed that out as well. The last point I'd say is this: we've been saying today that despite the very positive record of the OSCE, we believe that there is an assault by some countries on the democratic norms and human rights norms of the OSCE itself. Since the last meeting that we had twelve months ago in Brussels, in Belgium, there have been reports of journalists being intimidated or being harmed. There are reports of people running for elections who've been jailed. There have been reports of human rights abuses of a quite substantial nature in a number of the countries seating around the table of the OSCE. And so we made the point that all of us need to be mindful of this, we need to recognize what is happening, and we need to encourage those countries in the strongest terms to conform the democratic standards, particularly in the way that elections are held. And so the agenda this morning and this afternoon--elections, democracy, human rights, Kosovo, Afghanistan—is the heart of the

US-European agenda, which for us means that ODIHR is a very... the OSCE and ODIHR are very dynamic institutions.

So with that, by way of preliminary comments, I'll be very happy to take any questions that you have. Yes sir.

Q: [Inaudible]

US Burns: The treaty is not dead. The adapted treaty is not dead. We spent all day of today, my colleague Dan Fried, spent all day of today, negotiating on the CFE treaty. We still have hope that the Russian Federation is going to return back from its rather unilateralist threat to walk out. And I said in my intervention this morning, we need to be patient, we need to work with each other and we need to compromise, the United States on behalf of the Alliance, the NATO Alliance, has offered a quite fair compromise to the Russian Federation, new ideas. We've seen some very negative public comments from the Russian leaders, from Minister Lavrov, and others, this week. And we are sorry to see that, because the great prevailing sentiment in the room today was that the CFE needs to be preserved, that all of us need to meet the standards of the adapted CFE treaty, and I said of course that there is still more to do in Georgia, despite the progress there, and there is certainly more to do in Moldova, where we haven't seen any progress since 2004 and from Moldova, so the United States and our European allies have offered fair and new ideas, we don't believe any country should walk out of a major landmark European arms treaty unilaterally. That's what Russia is threatening to do, and I urged Russia, and many of my European colleagues urged Russia today, to stay in this arms control agreement and to work with us on a fair basis. So there is still hope, although today has not been a particularly auspicious day, we will continue to try to convince the Russian Republic not to walk out unilaterally the way they're threatening to do in about ten days time.

Yes, sir.

Q: [Inaudible]

US Burns: You translate, okay!

Interpreter: [Inaudible] ... on the issue of the Kazakh chairmanship.

US Burns: Spasibo, thank you very much. One of the issues that we have to decide and have not yet decided is who will be the chairman in office in 2009, 10 and 11. Finland is coming in as the chair in 2008. We have not yet decided this. I've had a number of very great and constructive conversations with Minister Tazhin today. I suppose we'll have more into the evening. No decisions have been made. As you know the OSCE operates by consensus, so each other country needs to agree to a proposal to name a chairman in office for 2009, 10 and 11. There are three countries that have been proposed. It's a complicated question, and the standard that the United States would offer is the following: any country that wishes to be chairman in office of the OSCE must commit

itself to preserve the institutions of the OSCE, to preserve ODIHR and not to change the mandate of ODIHR. Any country. And so that is one of the issues that's been discussed and so we'll let you know, I'm sure Minister Moratinos will let you know, if there is a decision. I don't know if there will be a decision today, if we... if we work well and hard then perhaps there will be, but we're... we're in the middle of discussions right now.

Yes.

Q: I just want to know if there has been any progress since you spoke to the press yesterday in convincing Russia of America's message that it was not in any way involved in influencing the OSCE's decision not to monitor elections this weekend.

US Burns: Well, you know, I'm not sure the United States is obligated to show any progress. This was a preposterous charge, and I said in my statement this morning, you will see it in the writing, it is untrue, it's an unfounded allegation that somehow the United States would have forced ODIHR to make a certain decision. It's an independent body, it makes its own decisions, and it was very clear that ODIHR was under substantial pressure from the Russian government. They weren't getting visas in time, they weren't allowed to have the number of monitors they wanted, but we in no way, shape or form tried to give advice to ODIHR on what it should do. It made its own decisions. These allegations were untrue, there're unfounded, and it was interesting the way it was phrased, "we had information on that." Where is the information? The Russian government hasn't been able to show it because it's not true. So I think it's up to the Russian government to reflect on the exceedingly unwise nature of that statement, there hasn't been a single government, of the more than fifty here, who has shown any sympathy for that statement. But we have a lot of sympathy because people know the reality and how the OSCE works. No country, no one country, influences the decisions in the matter that was suggested by the Russian government and the Russian President.

Q: Do you have any sense of why Russia would've pointed the finger at the United States?

US Burns: Oh, I can't possibly explain why the Russian government continues to make these outrageous statements about the United States. That's up to them. Notice something though, after this barrage of statements beginning at the Munich Security Conference last February, the United States government, President Bush on down, has taken a rather high road. We don't respond to these allegations that are outrageous in nature or polemical in nature. I simply stated that on behalf of my government today, the fact that is patently untrue, and we would challenge the Russian government to back up that statement with any degree of evidence that would support it. But, you know, we're not going to engage in a game of name calling, we're not going to engage in histrionic speeches. That's not what we do in our country.

Q: Apparently the Russian Foreign Minister today questioned the validity of the OSCE... (unintelligible) ... presumably because of the ODIHR issue... I know you said that there is an assault on the organization, but is there really a threat to its continued existence in any sense?

US Burns: Well, there's certainly not any threat to its relevance. If you look at the major international issues of the day that the European governments and those of us that are in the transatlantic relations are engaged in, what are they? Kosovo, which is going to face a profound transition. OSCE is there. Afghanistan, where really the entire democratic world is engaged economically, politically, militarily. We've now proposed and hopefully will decide today, an OSCE mission for Afghanistan. The issue of human rights, democratic freedoms, which is the basis of the last twenty years of European history. The OSCE is the guarantor and the watchdog, if you will, the warden of those democratic rights. So, we believe the OSCE is highly relevant to 21st century issues here in Europe. And, we believe that all countries should submit themselves and have nothing to fear from the OSCE and ODIHR coming into our countries as they've done over 100 times in the last 17 years to watch our elections. They were in our country in 2004, they were all over the United States. We welcomed them. They were in our country in 2000. If they want to come back in 2008 I'm sure they'll be welcome. I think the great sentiment in the room, the great majority of sentiment is: we want this organization to continue. That's what I heard from the German Foreign Minister, when Foreign Minister Steinmeier spoke, and the French Foreign Minister, when Foreign Minister Kouchner spoke, from the British representative here, Minister Murphy, who was here on behalf of the United Kingdom, and all of the other delegates. This is a necessary institution we need to strengthen it. And so, if someone is suggesting that the OSCE has lost its relevance I think that's a distinctly minority view. I don't think that in any way captures the sentiment in the room today that I heard.

Q: In the last couple of years it seems that the relationship between Russia and the western countries in the OSCE is becoming more difficult. Do you see any danger that the situation might go back to the situation similar to the Cold War? And ...

US Burns: No.

Q: ...does that mean that the OSCE might become more important because of this ...

US Burns: The OSCE ...

Q:.... would it be good for the OSCE but bad for the situation?

US Burns: I certainly wouldn't subscribe to that. It's a highly provocative question. The answer to your question is 'No.' Nobody believes that we're going to go back to the divisions, the dividing lines, or the separate camps, or the hostile ideologies of the Cold War, as you and we lived it from the late 1940s until the late 1980s, early 1990s. We're not going back there. There's a high degree of interdependence among us all economically.

Russia is one of the most important partners of the United States on counterterrorism, worldwide, and on counter proliferation. Look at the way that Russia and the United States are currently working on North Korea and on Iran. But it is true that many of us

worry about a centralization of power in Moscow. We worry about declining democratic freedoms there. And, we certainly want to protect the rights of countries as diverse as Estonia, or Moldova, or Georgia, to be truly sovereign and truly independent as they face specific challenges from the Russian Federation. And so I think that you have to look at this balance of interest. But, we're very realistic and none of us believe that we're going to go back to that type of situation. We are well beyond it. And most of you are Europeans. You should feel very proud of what Europe has become. It's the largest and most successful democratic space of any region in the world. So, I think we have to have a healthy perspective on what we're dealing with here. It's a competition of ideas to some extent, but we today, and a great majority of countries in the room, defended the OSCE and defended its relevance and importance.

Q: Yes, this morning in your speech you mentioned that if no other initiative got passed this week or at this session, that the one on Tajikistan and Afghanistan should be passed. And you also mentioned, you said, Tajikistan and other Central Asian states... I'm curious if you would speak a little bit on Tajikistan's role, and which are the other Central Asian states?

US Burns: Thank you. As we have experienced with the Afghan government, the multitude of problems that it faces, challenges that it faces, border security, which entails preventing crime, drug smuggling and terrorism, is essential to the future security of Afghanistan. Now NATO is there, providing internal security, with the Afghan National Army and Police. The European Union and the UN are there to provide economic and humanitarian assistance. The OSCE now has a niche, if you will, it has a role to play and that is working with the neighboring governments, Tajikistan, and some of the others, and I would include of course, we hope in the future, Uzbekistan and some of the others in that, to help all of them provide for more stable, lawful borders than currently exist. This has been a very good initiative to draw the Central Asian countries in the OSCE into the mainstream of our discussions. And so we're proud of what has been designed and we hope that, under Spanish leadership, we'll be able to get this decision made, either tonight or by the latest tomorrow morning.

Q: I would like to know if the United States supports the extension of the OSCE mission in Kosovo and what will be the United States' reaction if there is unilateral Kosovo independence after December 10.

US Burns: The question is does the United States support the extension of the OSCE mandate in Kosovo, question one. And question two: What will our position be if there is a declaration of independence?

On the first question, we argued very forcefully today that no matter what happens during this transitional period, the OSCE must stay in Kosovo. If it's been relevant to the people of Kosovo in the last year or two, it's going to be more relevant in the future. And so, there have been a few voices today and in past weeks saying that well, if there is to be a transition we refuse to support a mission. That's not very high-minded. That's not very realistic. The people of Kosovo are our major concern, the majority population, the

Kosovar-Albanians, as well as the minority population, the Kosovar-Serbs, the Turkic populations and so forth. And so we believe the OSCE must stay.

On the second question I would just say this: We made a commitment to the United Nations that the United States, the European Union and Russia would form a troika to try to put together a diplomatic solution that Belgrade and Pristina could agree on. We had a third round of discussions yesterday, which ended in disagreement. We have not given up the effort, and we will continue until, you know, midnight on December 10th, to try to see if we can bring those two together in some kind of an amicable arrangement. So, I think it really would be irresponsible of me to try to look beyond December 10th. But I would also say this: The United States has always believed that the United Nations plan, of President Ahtisaari, is a good plan. He's a very smart and wise leader. He made a great study of this based on extensive conversations. He's developed a very positive plan. That plan is still relevant for the future of Kosovo. But that is something that needs to be debated by the international community after December 10th. Until then, we'll be 100% focused on achieving a diplomatic settlement between Belgrade and Pristina.

Q: If Russia continues in its proposal about the ODIHR and the OSCE needs unanimity always, do you think this can be the end of the electoral mission?

US Burns: I don't. You know, I was State Department spokesman 10 years ago and I learned never to answer a hypothetical question. It only gets you into trouble. I respect your question, but let me just speak to the issue. I think Russia is very isolated at this conference on the question of ODIHR. What I heard in the room –I listened to, I don't know, 25 foreign ministers speak, and more have spoken than that. The great majority of them have said that ODIHR is vital and none of us have the right to write our own conditions for how ODIHR monitors our elections. I didn't hear any voices in support of the Russian attack on ODIHR. There may be some voices out there, but I have not heard them. So, I believe that ODIHR will survive, that all of us who are committed to democracy and free elections will submit to the inspection of ODIHR, happily, because we know that's the best guarantor of democratic rights. And I believe that ODIHR has a future. And the resounding voices that I hear in the room, not far from here, in the meeting room, is that we all need to defend ODIHR, and you're seeing that in the statements of the ministers today, not just from the United States, but from the European ministers.

Q: I think you had a meeting with the Minsk Group (unintelligible) What impression did you have on the stage of the proposals and on the elections next year ..(unintelligible) ... Do you have any remedy ...(unintelligible).

US Burns: You know, this is a positive story, so I hope the press will write about a positive story. The Minsk Group process is co-chaired by Russia, France and the United States, and Minister Lavrov, Minister Kouchner, and I, representing Secretary Rice, met this morning. We met with the Armenian and the Azeri foreign ministers. We gave them a proposal for how they can resolve the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh based on a certain set of principles that have grown out of the Minsk Group negotiations. We handed the

proposal to them. Minister Lavrov handed it to them on behalf of the three of us. And we said, "Please look at this proposal and end this frozen conflict, which goes all the way back to December 1991-January 1992 and of course the events of 1993. We've been at this for 15 years and it's an example of how Russia and the United States, as well as France, can work together. We were very happy to put this proposal forward, and I commend the Russian government, and I commend the French government for the leadership that they've shown. I know Secretary Rice is very, very optimistic that we're doing the right thing in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Okay, thank you very much.